

India inscribes 2 properties on the UNESCO's World Heritage List in the 45th Extended World Heritage Committee meeting at Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)

In the ongoing World Heritage Committee meeting (10-25 September 2023) at Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) India got its two properties nominated in the World Heritage list.

These sites are:

- Shantiniketan (declared on 17th September)
- The Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas (declared on 18th September)

Santiniketan

India submitted the nomination dossier for Santiniketan to the World Heritage Centre in January, 2021. The site was on the UNESCO's tentative list since 2010. Santiniketan is situated in a rural location in West Bengal, and is associated with the work and philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore, a world-famous poet, artist, musician and philosopher, and a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913). The site was established as an ashram and given its name in 1863 by Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore. The property was proposed under the criteria of (iv) and (vi).

In 1901, Rabindranath Tagore began its transformation to a residential school and centre for art, based on the ancient Indian tradition of gurukul. His vision was oriented at the unity of humanity, or "Visva Bharati". Distinct from the prevailing British colonial architectural orientations of the early 20th century and of European modernism, Santiniketan represents orientations toward a Pan-Asian modernity, drawing on ancient, medieval and folk traditions from across the region.

The Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas

The Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas, has been nominated as a serial property comprising three temples in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, namely the Channakeshava temple in Belur, the Hoysaleswara temple in Halebidu and the Keshava temple in Somanathapura, reflects the creative brilliance of the 13th century architects. The property has been identified under criteria i), ii) and iv) of the UNESCO's Operational Guidelines.

These temples are a culmination of various temple building traditions prevalent in the Northern, Central and Southern India such as the Nagara, Bhumiya and Dravida styles. Hence the inscription of these temples in the World Heritage List is a combined homage to the great temple building tradition of India.

Temples are richly experiential, with their exquisite architecture, sculptures and intricate carvings, reflecting the genius of the sculptors in translating religious beliefs, stories and abstract ideas into the medium of stone.

The practice of having sculptural panels narrating stories from the Hindu Epics and puranas along the walls of the temple deepened the religious experience of circumambulation path. The coming together of the creative genius, architectural eclecticism and symbolism into this outstanding sacred architecture makes these Hoysalas temples, a true work of art and their inscription is truly an honour for India and the entire World Heritage Community.

India and the World Heritage

India is currently the member of the WH Committee for its fourth term (2021-25). All Committee members congratulated India for the achievement. Currently the members of the World Heritage Committee are:

Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, and Zambia

With these two successful nominations, India has currently 42 world heritage properties overall, which include 34 cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed property. In addition, India has 50 sites on the UNESCO's Tentative List.

Presently, India has the sixth largest number of sites in the World. The countries that have 42 or more World Heritage sites and apart from India are Italy (59), China (57), Germany (52), France (51) and Spain (50).

It is pertinent to mention that as per UNESCO's Operational Guidelines, a country can nominate only one property in a year. India has added 12 new world Heritage sites since 2014, and this is testimony to the Hon'ble Prime Minister's steadfast commitment in promoting Indian culture, heritage and the Indian way of life.